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AYYANKALI URBAN EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE SCHEME AN ALTERNATIVE TO REDUCE URBAN POVERTY-A CASE STUDY OF CHALAKUDY MUNICIPALITY

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ABSTRACT

Kerala has its own place with respect to the implementation of several anti-poverty programs and employment generation programs. As a result, Kerala has attained remarkable achievement in social development by way of improvement in literacy, education, employment generation, and above all reduction in poverty. Recently the Government of Kerala introduced a new urban employment guarantee scheme named Ayyankali urban employment guarantee scheme for reducing poverty by providing employment to the urban people. The present study particularly focuses on the nature and functioning of the Ayyankali urban employment guarantee scheme and also understands the program's impact.

KEYWORDS: Poverty, Unemployment, Ayyankali Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme

INTRODUCTION

Poverty is an age-old and worldwide phenomenon. Poverty can be defined as a socioeconomic phenomenon in which a section of society is unable to fulfill the basic needs of life such as food, shelter, and clothing. The policymakers of our nation lay emphasis on minimal poverty. India had a very rich experience in the implementation of anti-poverty programs. But poverty still exists. The country has been implementing both wage employment and asset distribution programs. Currently, there are special programs for employment generation are being implemented both in rural and urban areas. Most of these programs are targeted only to eradicate rural poverty. But urban areas are also facing extreme levels of poverty but urban poverty eradication programs are rare.

In Kerala, the economy experiencing urban poverty is greater than rural poverty. Most of the urban dwellers work in the unorganized sector and have low wage rates. Compared to urban areas and rural areas, the cost of living is high in urban areas. For the purpose of reducing urban poverty rate in Kerala, the government of Kerala introduced a new wage employment program namely Ayyankali urban employment guarantee scheme. Ayyankali urban employment guarantee is similar to the MGNREGA model. This paper tries to understand the nature and function of this program and also evaluates the impact of the program.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the nature and functioning of the Ayyankali urban employment guarantee scheme.
2. To understand the impact of the program reducing urban poverty in Kerala.

STATEMENT OF THE STUDY

As we discussed before, so many centrally sponsored poverty eradication programs are implemented in Kerala like SGSRY, MGNREGA, IAY, etc. to reduce urban and rural poverty. The year 2011 government of Kerala introduced the urban employment guarantee scheme named AYYANKALI URBAN GUARANTEE SCHEME (AUEGS) with the aim of gender-sensitive poverty reduction. The present study is an attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of AUEGS in reducing urban poverty and also identify workers' attitudes toward the development of the particular program.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

There are a lot of poverty eradication programs in the state of Kerala. Most of these programs are focusing on rural poverty eradication. However, the urban sector is largely characterized by the presence of a growing informal sector. With the presence of this largely informal sector on the urban side, growing unemployment has become a major development problem in the urban sector. Unlike the rural sector, it is very difficult to get manual labor work in the urban sector. Whereas in the rural sector, the agriculture sector gives its people informal employment at least with a subsistence wage rate. Considering the present situation the government of Kerala introduces an urban poverty eradication program named AYYANKALI URBAN EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE SCHEME. With an aim to provide a strong, right-based social safety net for the people in the urban areas of Kerala by giving an employment source, when other employment alternatives are very minimum or inadequate. Therefore it is very significant in conducting a detailed study in assessing the effectiveness of AUEGS in easing the unemployment problem in the urban community.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data was collected from the field study using a structured questionnaire and conducted a group discussion with employment guarantee officers and municipal councilors. The secondary data was collected from different sources like journals, publications like economic reviews, etc.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In a study, Iyar Nikhil (2021) explains seven ways to bring women back into the labor force, provide livelihood and income security, and increase women's agency in cities. It evaluate the existing urban employment scheme in India. This study reports the impact of three wage employment programs in India. The result shows that the urban wage employment program is a gender-responsive program, it provides a unique opportunity to improve improvement in the female labor force participation rate and significant multiplier effect on the well-being and development of women and their families and in an accepted policy.

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Subramanian and Sahana (2023) point out that urban unemployment and the declining quality of human resources are two important crises faced by the Indian urban population. For the purpose of the study they use the capabilities approach to human development to asses the ayyankali urban employment guarantee scheme's impact on urban commons and on the beneficiary's well-being understood as human freedoms. The study shows that although the ayyankali urban employment guarantee scheme guidelines aim to improve beneficiaries' functioning and capabilities, structural and implementation issues hinder their realization.

OVERVIEW OF AYYANKALI EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE SCHEME.

During the 11th plan period, the government of Kerala introduced the Ayyankali urban employment guarantee scheme. For the purpose of eradicating poverty and unemployment in the urban area of the state.

Ayyankali urban employment guarantee scheme aims to provide a strong, right-based program for the urban people in Kerala by providing a source of employment when other employment alternatives are scarce or inadequate. To enhance livelihood security in urban areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult member volunteers to do unskilled manual work. AUEGS is similar to the MGNREGA model.

- **APPLICATION FOR REGISTRATION AND ISSUANCE OF JOB CARDS**

  The application for registration can be given on plain or in the prescribed application format available at the municipality level or an oral request for registration can be made. The application should contain the names of those adult members of the households who are willing to do unskilled manual work and particulars such as age, sex, SC, ST, status, etc. After verification, all particulars are entered in the registration register by the concerned municipality. Every household is assigned a registration number. job card to be issued by the municipality.

- **PERMISSIBLE WORK UNDER AUEGS**

The focus of the scheme shall be the following works.

1. Water conservation and water harvesting
2. Drought proofing (including afforestation, tree plantation, and greening activities.)
3. Micro irrigation.
4. Provision of irrigation to land owned by households belonging to scheduled castes/scheduled tribes and to land belonging to BPL and beneficiaries of the centrally sponsored scheme.
5. Renovation of traditional water bodies including desalting of tanks.
6. Land Development.
7. Flood control and protection works including drainage in water-logged areas.
8. Supplementary works in clusters covered in BSUP/HSDP/KSUPP.
9. Renovation works in colonies
10. Cleaning of debris/waste accumulated in public places.

- **KEY FEATURES OF THE SCHEME.**
  - It provides employment opportunities to vulnerable families in urban areas where there is no employment or otherwise.
  - To ensure the social rights of the urban poor.
  - Every family registered in the municipality will be given a job card within 15 days.
  - Every registered family has the right to apply for employment under this scheme.
  - It provides 50% of the total employment opportunities for women.
  - Women and men are entitled to equal work in the scheme.
  - If the worker is injured /ill on the job, he/she will receive free medical treatment.
  - In the event of a hospital stay due to a work accident, the worker shall be entitled to get a daily wage of not less than half the allowable wage under the scheme.
  - If a worker is permanently disabled or dies as part of his employment at the workplace his legal heir will be paid an ex-gratia of Rs 50000.

ELIGIBILITY

The AUEGS is open to all urban households in the areas notified by the government of Kerala. The entitlement of 100 days of guaranteed employment in a financial year is in terms of a household whose registered person can apply for work. To register, they have to,

a) Being local residents "local "implies residing with the municipality.
b) Be willing to do unskilled manual work.
c) Apply as a household at the municipality.

- **APPLICATION FOR WORK AND ALLOCATION OF EMPLOYMENT.**

Application for work can be submitted to the municipality as well as to the programmer to the officer. The application should be given in writing and the dated receipt for the application for work must be issued work are to the applicant. The application for work must be for at least 14 days of continuous of work. Applications that are provided work are to be initiated by means of a letter sent to be then at the address beyond the officers of the municipality.

- **PAYMENT OF THE WAGE**
  - Every person working under the scheme is entitled to wage at the minimum wage fixed by the state government.
  - Equal wages are to be paid to both men and women workers.
  - Workers are entitled to be paid on a weekly basis (within 14 days) for a night on which work is done.
  - If an applicant for employment under the scheme is not provided such employment within 15 days of receipt of his applicant seeking employment, he shall be entitled to a daily unemployment allowance which will be one-fourth of the wage rate for the first thirty days during the financial year and one half of the wage rate for the remaining period of the financial year.
  - The payment of unemployment allowance is the liability of the state government.

IMPACT OF THE AYYANKALI URBAN EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE SCHEME TO REDUCE POVERTY AND UNEMPLOYMENT IN URBAN AREAS.

Kerala became the first state to implement a wage employment guarantee scheme for the urban poor. The scheme was, however, slow to pick up in the initial period due to less demand, lack of awareness, and low allocations.it is a demand-driven program, it provides 100 days of wage employment to the urban poor to break up the extreme poverty in Kerala. AUEGS creates

spectacular change in the urban area. One of the most important aims of the AUEGS is to reduce poverty through additional wage employment and create public assets. The major impact of the program is given below.

EMPLOYMENT CREATION: One of the most important objectives of AUEGS is they create employment opportunities for the urban poor. Kerala's economy is experiencing a high unemployment rate in urban areas. It provides 100 days of wage employment to the urban poor. In the financial year 2022-23, 46.33 lakh person days have been created as against three lakh person days in 2015-16, and 8, 46,432 in 2017-18. Now, out of the 3, 50,000 families that have registered under the scheme, 1, 00,000 workers are permanently dependent on the scheme. In the initial period, only 15 core finance was allotted for this scheme. But in the 2022-23 budget, 125 cores were allotted for this scheme. AUEGS is specially focused on unskilled laborers without age limits. AUEGS provides b opportunities to unskilled persons. So AUEGS has created a great impact on the employment generation in the urban area.

FINANCIAL INCLUSION: AUEGS aimed to uplift the urban poor by providing wage employment. Most of the urban poor are working in the unorganized sector with low wage rates. They are financially and socially excluding people.AUEGS provides financial stability and security for the urban poor.

EMPOWERMENT OF VULNERABLE SECTION OF THE PEOPLE: AUEGS provides more priority to women and ST/SC of the people.it ensures that 50% of the employment to the women. More than 90% of those registered under AUEGS are women. As well as more than 17% of the registered families under AUEGS are from the SC category and 1.82% are ST families. AUEGS provides employment opportunities to the most vulnerable section of the people.

ASSET CREATION: Another important advantage of AUEGS is it helps to create public assets in the urban area. The important works undertaken by the municipalities and corporations include the construction of drainages, compost pit, reclamation of wasteland, recharging of wells, ponds, and canals, and planting trees. The major activities taken under the AUEGS include subhiksha keralam, waste management activities, pre-monsoon cleaning, water conservation, afforestation, and house construction under PMAY.

CONCLUSION

Ayyankali urban employment guarantee scheme is a novel concept aiming to reduce urban poverty and protect vulnerable sections of people in society. It is to be argued that AUEGS is an alternative tool for reducing urban poverty through providing employment opportunities and other allowances to urban poor people. AUEGS is a state-sponsored scheme sharing costs between the state governments and municipalities. Ayyankali urban employment guarantee scheme aims to provide a strong, right-based social safety net for the people in the urban areas of Kerala by giving them a source of employment when other alternatives are insufficient.

Ayyankali urban employment guarantee scheme is very helpful to urban women. Most of the participants are female, which leads to the empowerment of women as an improving standard of living for urban people because the cost of living is very high in urban areas. This scheme provides unemployment allowance, scholarships, insurance, and pensions. This paper tries to understand the impact of the program to reduce urban poverty. The conclusion is that the Ayyankali urban employment program creates a great impact on reducing urban poverty and providing more employment opportunities to unskilled urban poor people.

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